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ABSTRACT

In March 1995 the Ohio General Assembly enacted a Pilot Project Scholarship Program intended to provide a limited number of vouchers to allow Cleveland public school students to attend alternative schools, i.e. private schools, including those operated by religious organizations, within the Cleveland city limits and public schools in surrounding suburban school districts. Vouchers were to be available for the first time in the 1996-97 school year. Voucher winners were to be chosen by lottery, with voucher winners accepted by lottery into the alternative schools with preferences given for current students and their siblings. The maximum voucher value was to be $2,500, with reductions for increasing income above the federal poverty line until eligibility ended at 200% of the poverty level. Students, once admitted, could continue receiving vouchers through grade 8, subject to continued funding by the state. Although about 4,000 families were made some kind of voucher offer, many refused. An evaluation was designed to determine why so many did not enroll, and the significance this might have for future program management and evaluation. The designed evaluation will have a study of parent choice and satisfaction, with interviews with at least 25 parents (those that enrolled children and those that did not), and a study of the initial effectiveness of the program in terms of student achievement, subject to the limitations of available data. The rationale behind and planned implementation of both evaluation components are described. (SLD)

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TOWARD AN EVALUATION DESIGN FOR THE CLEVELAND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

By

Paul T. Hill
and
Stephen P. Klein

November, 1996

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THE PROGRAM STRUCTURE

In March 1995 the Ohio General Assembly enacted a Pilot Project Scholarship Program intended to provide a limited number of vouchers to allow Cleveland public school students to attend "alternative schools," i.e. private schools (including schools operated by religious organizations) within the Cleveland city limits and public schools in surrounding suburban school districts.[1] Vouchers were to be available for the first time during the 1996-1997 school year, for Cleveland students entering kindergarten through third grade. Though the program was primarily intended to benefit children previously attending public schools, the statute allowed up to 50% of recipients to be children already attending private schools.

The same statute also established a program of tutorial assistance grants for children attending public schools. This paper, however, focuses on the voucher, or "scholarship" program.

Voucher winners were to be chosen by lottery. Lottery winners then applied to an alternative school that had agreed to accept voucher students. Admissions to alternative schools were also governed by the statute. Schools agreeing to admit voucher students were allowed to give first priority to current students and their siblings. Voucher applicants were then to be admitted by lottery until they made up 20% of all the students in grades K-3. If a school still had vacancies it could then admit students whose families are members of organizations that provide financial support for the school. If there were still open seats, these were to be filled via a lottery in which all remaining applicants participated. For most existing schools this order of admissions priority means that voucher students will make up at most 20% of their populations. For schools with very large numbers of vacancies, including new schools that have no slots filled by current students and few applicants other

[1] The Ohio Supreme Court upheld a lower court's ruling that the voucher program did not violate Constitutional principles on separation of church and state. See *Gatton et. al. vs. Goff, and Doris Simmons-Harris et. al. vs. Goff*, Franklin County Curt of Common Pleas, Case No. 96-CVH-01-193, July 21, 1996.

than voucher recipients, the proportion of voucher students enrolled could rise as high as 100%.

The maximum value of a voucher for a student enrolling in a private school was to be $2,500, less 10% for a child whose family income was less than 200% of the federally-established poverty line, or less 25% for a child whose family income was more than twice the poverty line. Private schools with posted tuition rates less than $2,500 could not raise their rates for voucher students. Families were required to make arrangements for the tuition amounts not paid by the state (up to $250 in the case of those whose incomes were below twice the poverty line and up to $625 for those whose incomes exceeded twice the poverty line). Parents could work in the schools to make up the difference. Schools could also waive the remaining tuition. Children eligible for special education could participate in the program, and the Cleveland public schools would continue to pay the excess cost of special services allocated to cover those children's individualized education plans.

If Cleveland voucher students enrolled in suburban public schools, the receiving school would be funded under both the state's "open enrollment rules," which permit transfer of state funds amounting to approximately $3,300 for each student who transfers, and under the voucher program. Thus, they could receive as much as $5,550 -- the state's normal funding plus $2,250, the maximum value of a voucher.

Once admitted to the voucher program, students could continue receiving assistance through grade eight, provided the state legislature appropriated the necessary funds. Subject to appropriations, the program would continue indefinitely, each year admitting new children entering kindergarten through grade three. In any year the legislature failed to appropriate funds for the program, alternative schools would be allowed to charge former voucher recipients an amount limited to the value of the voucher plus the family's contribution. In late 1996 it was not known whether a new cohort of voucher students would be admitted for the 1997-1998 school year.

The cost of the vouchers was to be borne by the state, but out of special program funds, some of which might otherwise have gone to the Cleveland Public Schools. In the first year of the program, Cleveland public schools lost no money because students who transferred to alternative schools were still included in

Cleveland's count of average daily school membership. The state also reimbursed the Cleveland public schools for the cost of transporting voucher program students to the alternative schools. In subsequent years, however, voucher students would not be included in Cleveland's funding base.

In the late summer of 1995, the Ohio Department of Education established a Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Office, (hereafter the Cleveland Office) which was responsible for receiving family scholarship applications, registering local private and suburban schools willing to accept voucher students, verifying students' family incomes and eligibility for the program, managing the admissions lottery required by law, and arranging student admissions and tuition payments.[2] The Cleveland Office solicited applications from parents and potential alternative schools, conducted a lottery as required by the statute, and arranged for the first group of voucher students to enter alternative schools in September, 1996. Because no neighboring public school district agreed to accept Cleveland voucher students, all participating schools were private schools operating within city limits.[3]

THE PROGRAM AS IMPLEMENTED

The State Department of Public Instruction exercised policy discretion granted by the statute in several ways: it limited voucher eligibility to children whose family incomes were at or below 200% of poverty; it limited the proportion of scholarships for children previously attending private schools to 25%, not the 50% allowed in the statute[4]; it conducted the lottery to give first priority to children whose families were below 100% of the poverty line; and it constructed the lottery to ensure that at least 70% of the low income students selected were African American, so that the selection would reflect the current racial balance of the Cleveland public schools.

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[2] The law required the state to make out tuition checks in the names of the recipient children's parents. To ensure that these checks were used for tuition and not general family income, checks were sent to the schools and endorsed over to the school by parents. The Ohio Courts cited this arrangement as evidence that state support went to families, not private schools.

[3] The Cleveland office apparently made serious efforts to recruit suburban schools to the program, but all refused. Reasons cited included limited vacancies, mismatch between existing programs and voucher students' needs, and suburban districts' unwillingness to participate in a program perceived as threatening to a neighboring public school system.

[4] The Cleveland Office considered all children entering kindergarten in fall 1996 to be public school students. Because kindergarten students were more than 1/4 of the total number of K-3 students in the voucher program, this allowed former private school students to make up 33% or more of the voucher students in grades 1 through 3.

Table 1 summarizes key differences among statutory provisions, state policy, and actual implementation.

Table 1: Key Elements of the Program in State Law and Policy and as Implemented by the Cleveland Office

	Provisions of Statute	State Policy	Program as Implemented
Maximum % of vouchers that can go to students already attending private school	Up to 50%	Up to 25%	As near 25% as possible, depending on number of public school voucher students enrolling (currently ~29%)
Eligibility of Students with family income between 100% and 200% of poverty	Not addresses	Defined as second priority in lottery	375 offered vouchers after all poverty families were given the chance to verify income
Eligibility of students with family income >200% of poverty	Eligible: voucher worth 75% of maximum $2500 tuition	Lower priority	None enrolled
Proportion of voucher students who must be African American	No Provision	70%, to reflect public schools' racial composition and abide by Federal Court Consent Decree	70% of families offered vouchers
Alternative schools in which voucher winners can enroll	Private schools in Cleveland and public schools in neighboring districts	Same as in statute	Only Cleveland private schools (due to suburban publics' refusal)

For the 1996-1997 school year, parents applied on behalf of 6,246 children for slots in private schools.[5] Since school tuition varied between $900 and $2,500, it was not known in advance how many vouchers would be created under the program. As it turned out, 1,800 vouchers were awarded at an average tuition cost of $1,800. Of the applications received, 1,790 were for students already attending private schools and 4,456 were for students either attending Cleveland Public schools or entering kindergarten. Since the number of slots for students already attending private schools was limited to 1/4 of the total, approximately 450 slots were available for students already attending private schools.

The Cleveland Scholarship Office conducted a lottery in January, 1996. A total of 1125 low income public school students (790 African American) and 375 low income private school students (not divided by race) were drawn, plus a waiting list of 285 students drawn in the same proportions. Families of the low income students drawn in the lottery were offered the opportunity to arrange private school placements. These families were asked to visit the Cleveland Office to verify income and those that did were given their choice among the available private school slots. All other applicants were given lottery numbers and placed on secondary waiting lists.

Because many of the public school students originally drawn did not take the option of enrolling in private schools, all the public school families on the original waiting list were asked to verify their incomes. All families that verified their incomes were eventually offered vouchers. In March, 1996, as it became obvious that some private school slots would still be available, all the public school families in the original applicant pool that had incomes below the poverty level and had not already been offered a voucher were offered opportunities to verify income against the possibility that they might be offered slots in private schools. Those families that appeared and verified their low income status were all offered vouchers. In June, 1996, 375 applicants whose family incomes were between 100% and 200% of poverty were asked to verify income and those who did so were offered vouchers. After school opened in the fall, some vacancies in private schools still remained, and a

[5] All numbers cited in this paper are approximate: the Cleveland Office continues to refine its data on applicants, based on efforts to remove duplicate applications, verify family claims on income and prior school placements, and adjust for mid-year changes in student enrollment (i.e. entry of new students into the program and attrition from alternative schools).

total of 1,000 below-poverty income families were contacted again in November and given another opportunity to verify income and apply for remaining slots on a first-come first-served basis. If any private school slots were still available after November, they would be offered to non-poverty families.

The only group of eligible applicants who were not eventually offered the opportunity to verify income and receive vouchers were members of the waiting list for children who had attended private schools in the previous year. This waiting list did not clear because families already paying private school tuition seldom turned the vouchers down. The numbers of slots for these students were also limited by the 25% rule set by state policy: since former public school students filled fewer slots than expected, fewer slots could be offered to private school students. Table 2 summarizes the sequence of offers made to groups of parents.

Table 2: Public School Students' Opportunities to Receive Vouchers

	Offered Slots after Jan. 1996 lottery	Asked to verify income in February, 1996*	Asked to verify income in March and June 1996*	Asked to verify income in November, 1996**
Income <100% poverty	1125	~660	~1375	~1000
Income <200% poverty	0	0	952	0

NB. There is some duplication in the counts in columns 2, 3, and 4

* Families were asked to verify incomes in order to stay on the waiting list. All who verified incomes were offered vouchers.

** Families were asked to verify incomes in order to gain access to private school slots on a first come-first served basis

By late October, 1996 some 1801 voucher recipients were enrolled in a total of 51 private elementary schools, 35 Catholic and all but 4 of the others affiliated with religious denominations. Two new private schools, both non-sectarian, were created in response to the voucher program. One of the new schools had the highest enrollment of voucher students, 258. Of the religious schools, the one enrolling the most students was a Christian school with 141 voucher recipients. Eight schools

enrolled less than ten voucher students. Kindergarten students accounted for 635 of the total; there were also 441 first graders, 404 second graders, and 321 third graders.

PROGRAM ENROLLMENT PATTERNS AND EVALUATION DESIGN

The Cleveland Office was able to fill 1801 slots from an original applicant list of 6,246. A total of 1,600 were excluded from the lottery because of income above 200% of poverty, and an unknown number of additional applicants might have been ineligible, because they failed to provide information about family income.

Approximately 4,000 families of public school students were ultimately made some kind of offer. The offers made to families differed from one time to another. The original lottery winners were told that they would be offered slots in private school, subject only to proof of income. Other groups were later asked to verify income in order to stay on a waiting list that had some chance of obtaining slots in private schools. Though all the families who verified income in response to the offers made in March, June, and November were eventually given the choice of enrolling their children in private school, families did not know that everyone who verified income would be offered a slot. Families that received the November offer faced a different situation -- they could claim vouchers on a first-come first-served basis, but they could enroll their children only in the private schools that still had vacancies. These families also faced a prospect that the original lottery winners did not, of transferring schools in mid-year.

Why did so many offered vouchers not enroll, and what significance might the low enrollment rate have for future program management and evaluation?

If voucher advocates and opponents agree on one thing, it is that parents who apply for vouchers are likely to use them. Most assume that parents who want to use vouchers either have strong complaints against the public schools or are strongly attracted to one or another characteristics of private schools. Consequently, the design of the Cleveland program did not anticipate a high refusal rate among the original lottery winners. Once the original lottery winners were processed, the Cleveland Office's offers to additional families were different and almost certainly less attractive. In retrospect a number of factors might, either separately or in combination, account for the high refusal rate, including:

- A federal court's lifting of a long-standing requirement for cross-district busing of elementary students. This occurred in May, 1996, long after parents had applied to the voucher program, and opened up an option within the public school system that had previously been unavailable.

- The possibility that some families applied for vouchers because they expected a teachers' strike to close the public schools in September, 1996. Labor issues were settled and the strike averted before school opened.

- The possibility that parents who won vouchers used them as leverage to negotiate desirable placements for their children in public schools, e.g. in magnet programs.

- Parents' concerns over relatively long trips to private schools, using publicly-funded but unproved transportation arrangements.

- The program's requirement that parents either pay or work for 10% of their child's tuition (25% for families whose incomes were above 200% of the poverty line).

- Parents' possible reluctance to cooperate with the voucher program's income verification requirements.

- Working families' reluctance to participate in a state benefit program that to them resembled welfare.

- Controversy among African-American community leaders about the wisdom of abandoning public schools.

- The possibility that some parents were interested only in enrolling their children in one of the well-known private schools, and finding those slots taken, preferred to keep children in public schools.

- The controversy surrounding the voucher program, suggesting to some parents that tuition benefits might disappear after the first year.

There are, in addition, some reasons to question whether all applications were bona fide. Parents whose original applications did not acknowledge all their income may have been reluctant to appear and have their incomes verified (which could be done by simply showing a pay stub for one parent or guardian).

At this early stage in the life of the program it is impossible to know what the high refusal rate means about the demand for vouchers, parents' willingness to pay

small fractions of private school tuitions, or parents' views of the relative quality of private and public schools. With a year's experience, information networks are bound to develop, and parents might learn much more about what is available in private schools -- they might conclude that previously unknown private schools are highly desirable, that transportation arrangements are acceptable, and that school activities in which some parents engage to pay the family's fraction of tuition are not burdensome. Parents who preferred the new option of enrolling their children in neighborhood public schools might also become disillusioned. These changes might increase the acceptance rate, should the program continue adding students in the future. Of course, the opposite could happen. Any strategy for evaluating the Cleveland Voucher Program must include a close study of parents' choices and satisfaction.

The high refusal rate also has important implications for any effort to link participation in the voucher program to student outcomes. Because all the eligible students were eventually made some form of offer, and many did not respond to the request to verify income, there is no randomly chosen "control group" of lottery losers. Families that did not appear in response to requests to verify income might not have been eligible, or their desire to enroll their children in private schools might have been weak. The pool of low income families that did not ultimately enroll their children in private schools variously composed of several non-mutually exclusive groups, including those that rejected a sure voucher, those who knew their incomes exceeded the eligibility limits, those who were not interested in the private schools that still had vacancies after the original lottery winners were placed, and those who left Cleveland after applying for vouchers in January 1996.

These facts eliminate the theoretically best approach to assessing program effectiveness; i.e., comparing the student outcomes (test score growth, attendance, course passing, interest in school) between two groups of students, namely (1) those attending private schools with voucher assistance and (2) those attending public schools after losing in a lottery.[6] This ideal approach allows comparisons between

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[6]The widely publicized debate about evaluation of the Milwaukee voucher program has turned on the question of whether there was a randomly selected group of voucher "losers" that could be used as a control. In this case the argument is moot: there is no such group. Re. Milwaukee, see Peterson, Paul E., Jay P. Greene and Chad Noyes, School Choice in Milwaukee, *The Public Interest*, Fall 1996; also Witte, John F., Politics, Who Benefits from the Milwaukee Choice Program? in Richard Elmore, Bruce Fuller, and Gary Orfield, eds., *Who Chooses, Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of*

groups of children whose parents expressed interest in private school, some of who won a voucher lottery, and others of whom lost. Such a comparison eliminates "self-selection bias" --- unmeasurable difference in attitudes and motivations between families that sought entry to private schools and those that did not. Because there is no randomly assigned group of "losers" in the voucher lottery, another and somewhat less desirable approach, comparing voucher students' outcomes with those of a statistically constructed sample of Cleveland public school students, is the only option available.

A serious assessment of the Cleveland voucher program must therefore have at least two parts: a study of parents' choices and satisfaction, comparing those who declined vouchers and those who accepted them; and a statistical study of voucher students' outcomes relative to demographically similar Cleveland public school students. The next two sections will provide specifications for these studies. The conclusion will also include recommendations about how the State of Ohio can administer the voucher program in future years to ensure that comparisons between randomly selected groups of students can be made.

School Choice. New York, Teachers College Press, 1996

CHOICE AND SATISFACTION STUDY

The "Choice and Satisfaction" study will be conducted to achieve three goals: (1) understand why many families that applied for vouchers ultimately declined the opportunity to enroll children in private schools; (2) assess initial parental satisfaction with the program; and (3) understand the ways in which Cleveland private and public schools responded to the voucher program, by creating new vacancies and tailoring programs to appeal to voucher students. Offerors' work plan for this study must have the following components:

1. **Face-to-face interviews with parents** (minimum 25) to develop a more complete list of the factors that contributed to their accepting versus rejecting the vouchers they were offered. These factors might include the reasons for rejecting vouchers listed above. The interviews should also explore the factors that affected parents' satisfaction with the voucher program overall and with their children's current school placement and experience.

The parents interviewed for this purpose should be a stratified cross-section of all applicants, both those that eventually enrolled children in voucher schools and those that did not. Possible stratification factors for selecting parents include the child's grade and income level (above or below poverty level), neighborhood (zip code), whether the child was enrolled in a public or private school in the Spring of 1996, whether the child was one of the initial lottery winners versus whether the child was initially placed on one or another waiting list, and whether the child is now using a voucher to attend private school. Information on all families that applied for vouchers is now available in machine readable form. By December 31, 1996 the Cleveland Office will also provide in machine readable form data regarding the school preferences listed on the application forms.

Interviews may be conducted in small groups or one-on-one at the Cleveland Office, at neighborhood schools or churches, or in other locations proposed by the study contractor. Parents should receive a small honorarium (e.g., $10.00) for participating in this activity. The project also might reimburse for taxi fares.

2. **Use of the information from Step #1 to develop and pilot test an easy to read, group administered, parent questionnaire.** This questionnaire, which

should take no more than 30 minutes to complete, would inquire about why parents applied for the program, why they did or did not accept a voucher, and their satisfaction with the choices they made.

3. Survey of approximately 500 parents who applied for the voucher program. Parents should be selected via a sampling plan using the types of stratification factors listed above. Parents selected for the survey may be contacted by a combination of mail, telephone, school announcements, and other forms of invitation.

4. Administration of the questionnaire at a minimum of five sites in the Cleveland area. Sites may be public or private middle or high school cafeterias or auditoriums (or other school facilities in which seats are large enough to accommodate adults). Parents should receive a nominal honorarium (e.g., $10.00) and refreshments for participating in this activity. The project also might arrange busing or reimburse for taxi fares to further insure a high response rate and thereby avoid biasing results by including only the most intensely interested parents.

A group administered survey is suggested because of concerns about the parents' reading proficiency, their access to private telephones at home, and related issues. Questionnaires must not be anonymous because it is necessary to link responses with data from the parents' voucher application forms (e.g. parents expression of preference among alternative schools) and with individualized demographic and test score data in the Cleveland Public School database.

5. Analysis of the survey data and preparation of a report of the findings on bases for parents choices among schools and their satisfaction with their children's current schooling experiences. This report should be suitable for submission to a professional journal; e.g., it should include a review of the literature regarding school choice. It also should contain suggestions for possible changes in how the program was implemented, including eligibility rules.

6. Performance and analysis of a survey of heads of participating alternative schools and of Cleveland public schools from which large numbers of students left to enter alternative schools. The survey will explore the schools' supply responses.

In the case of private schools admitting voucher students it will assess schools' policies and methods regarding creating new vacancies for voucher students (e.g. expanding classrooms, hiring new teachers, or filling only previously empty slots), and creation of new instructional programs to attract or meet the needs of voucher students. It will also inquire about voucher students' failure and attrition rates, and instructional challenges such students pose in private schools. In the case of Cleveland public schools the survey will explore schools' efforts to attract voucher students who had the choice of attending private schools, and perceived effects of voucher students' departure on school enrollment, funding, and programs.

Offerors should display understanding of the issues to be explored in this study, and provide detailed explanations of the sampling, interviewing, and analysis methods to be used. Offerors should devote particular attention to methods of gaining high response rates among low income families and conducting interviews with adults who might have low degrees of reading skill. The project schedule must also take account of the urgency of interviewing parents before their memories of choices made in early 1996 have time to fade.

(The RFP should specify what resources and assistance the Cleveland Office can provide, including identifying places to conduct the surveys, inviting parents to participate, transportation arrangements, etc.).

INITIAL EFFECTIVENESS STUDY

The primary goal of the Cleveland voucher program is to improve student achievement in reading and mathematics. However, as explained above, obtaining a valid measure of effectiveness will be difficult because of the lack of a control group of voucher applicants who "lost" in a lottery. Virtually every program eligible family that applied for a voucher was offered some form of opportunity that could have led to their child's enrollment in a private school. Many either turned down the opportunity or failed to take action that could have resulted in a voucher. Nevertheless, it may be possible to glean some information about initial program effects (i.e., after one year of operation) by examining whether voucher students score higher or lower than similarly situated non-voucher students. (If the program continues admitting new students after the 1996-1997 school year it might be possible to create a randomly selected control group for future cohorts of students. But the study described here is for the first-year cohort, for which no such control group can exist).

The feasibility of an effectiveness study on the 1996-1997 cohort depends on several factors, not the least of which are (1) the ability to identify and read the machine readable records of 1996 Cleveland public school children who are currently enrolled in the voucher program and (2) the completeness of these records. Before the study is initiated it must be ascertained that public school records contain students' Spring 1996 reading and mathematics test scores, birth date, number of parents in the home, whether the student is or is not in the free lunch program, and other relevant demographic data. (Such data do not appear to exist for students who were enrolled in private schools in Spring 1996).

If the public school records of those currently enrolled in the program can be found and if they are reasonably complete, then some indication of program effectiveness can be obtained by comparing these data to scores students earn on a special (contractor conducted) May 1997 test administration.

This administration would involve two groups of students. Group A would consist of all the program children who are currently in grades 2 and 3 at public and private schools and whose 1995-96 machine readable records could be found. Group B would consist of current second and third graders at Cleveland

public schools who are not in the voucher program and whose 1995-96 machine readable records could be found.

A regression equation could be constructed with group B. This equation would use the spring 1996 test scores and background data to estimate a student's spring 1997 scores. This equation could then be applied to the students in Group A to see if their spring 1997 scores are generally higher, lower, or about the same as would be "expected" (i.e., based on the typical relationships among these variables in Group B). To enhance the credibility of this study, the spring 1997 testing should be done in both public and private schools, it should be independent of any other testing that was being done in these schools, and the tests should be administered by the contractor (although a classroom teacher also would be present). The test used for this purpose should not be identical to the ones used by the district (but an alternate form may be satisfactory).

Offerors may suggest one or more alternative strategies for measuring program effectiveness, including forms of tests to be used, sampling of schools and students, methods of test administration, and data analysis. Offerors must describe their methods for conducting the study described above but they may also propose alternative approaches. For each proposed approach, the contractor should discuss its advantages and limitations for assessing the program's ability to improve student reading and mathematics scores. This discussion should include consideration of such issues as attrition from the program, voucher and non-voucher students changing schools during the year, and related concerns that could threaten or impact the internal or external validity of the study.

Offerors should provide a detailed data collection and analysis plan. This plan should describe the number of students tested, the measures that will be used, and a discussion of the analytic methods employed. The contractor should also identify supplementary information about students to be collected from the school, e.g. attendance rates, grades, course placement and passing, etc. The following information is provided to help the contractor develop this plan: (To be provided in the RFP by the Ohio Department of Education).

There are currently 1801 students in the Cleveland voucher program.

Tables __ show the approximate number of voucher children at each grade level that are currently in public and private schools who did and did not come from the Cleveland city schools.

Table ___shows the number of voucher children by grade level at each school as of 10/31/96 broken down by whether or not their machine readable Cleveland city public school records could be found.

Table __ shows the number of voucher students (by grade level and variable) whose data could be found in the Cleveland city public school machine readable database.

Table __ shows the correlation among selected variables in the Cleveland city public school machine readable database. These variables include the students' reading and mathematics test scores in grades 1, 2, and 3; number of parents in the home, whether receiving free lunch, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE VOUCHER PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Experience with voucher program admissions in 1996 suggests that creation of a randomly selected control group of lottery "losers" is not automatic, and that no such group will be available unless program managers take special care. This section suggests actions that might make it possible for the outcomes of future cohorts of Cleveland voucher students to be compared with a truly similar group of students attending the Cleveland public schools. These suggestions apply only if additional students are admitted for 1997-1998 or subsequent years. They also assume that new students are admitted for some grades other than kindergarten. Families seeking vouchers for kindergarten will include some that would have enrolled their children in private schools in any case. Thus, a number of "losers" are likely to attend the same private schools as "winners," confounding any comparisons of winners' and losers' school outcomes.

The Problem

If there is a high rejection rate among voucher applicants chosen by lottery, it is extremely difficult to create a randomly selected losers' pool. The families that are offered vouchers and turn them down are obviously different from those who accept; the losers' pool would almost certainly include families that would have turned down vouchers if they were offered. Thus, when acceptance rates are significantly less than 100% (e.g. 90% or less) the pool of "loser" applicants will always be very different from the pool of those using vouchers to enroll in private schools.

Implications

The Cleveland Scholarship Program's experience with relatively high refusal rates suggests the need to pre-screen applicants in an effort to cut down the number who would not take vouchers even if they won. Such a pre-screen must eliminate applicants whose family incomes make their children ineligible, families that do not live in Cleveland, and families that might falsely claim their children attended public school in the previous year. At the time of their first application, parents should be required to:

Demonstrate income with something like a tax return or welfare form, not just a pay stub from one job.

Provide conclusive proof of residence in Cleveland.

Provide documentary evidence of what school their child is currently attending.

Give detailed information about the child: full name, birth date, schools previously attended, and social security number if available.

The family application form should also include a place for a work contact for one parent and a second contact for the family -- another family member, friend, or pastor, who will know how to reach the parents if the family moves. All enrollment information should be computerized immediately.

Parents should also be pre-screened to eliminate those likely to reject a private school placement if offered. In particular, parents should be required to sign a form saying they understand their child's attendance at private school could cost them as much as $250/yr, in tuition, or that they might have to work in the school in lieu of paying their share of tuition. The program should also provide a great deal of advance information about private school options before, not after, families apply, via brochures, community meetings, school fairs, school tours, etc. If possible, parents should be asked before the lottery whether there is only a limited set of private schools to which they would send their children in preference to the available public schools.

Between the time families apply and are entered into a lottery, the Cleveland Office should also obtain student numbers for those currently in public schools. This should be entered into the student's computerized record, as should any forms used to register school preferences and choices.

The lottery might also be administered to minimize parental refusals. If parent preference forms indicate that some private schools are over-subscribed, lotteries for admissions to those schools should be conducted first. Parents who indicate that they will send their children only to those private schools, and who lose in the lottery, could then be considered part of a randomly-selected "losers' pool."

After the lottery, the key to maximizing the voucher acceptance rate is prompt and insistent notification of families. The program should inform parents through multiple channels -- home addresses and telephone numbers, work addresses, secondary family contacts, and current school placements.

Once students are enrolled in school, the program needs to stay in contact with as many students as possible, both lottery winners and losers. High attrition from either group will seriously threaten the validity of study findings. Given the high turnover rates in urban schools, effectiveness studies are constantly threatened by this problem; it is particularly serious if one group (likely the students attending public schools) suffers attrition at a far higher rate than the group to which it is compared. Preventing devastating sample attrition will require frequent (possibly twice a year) checks of both public and private schools to verify current school placements and obtain any available information on students who have departed the school. The Cleveland office or a contractor hired to conduct effectiveness studies should also promptly follow up family contacts to find students who have changed schools.

These measures are particularly critical for any multi--year study of a given cohort of students. The state should be aware that any effort to conduct such a study could be defeated by sample attrition, no matter how diligently the state and contractor work to maintain contact with students.

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